

TITLE: Communications to the Editor
 The DO Culture: An Oxymoron?

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VOLUME: 35 ISSUE: Winter YEAR: 1991

STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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COMMUNICATIONS TO THE EDITOR

The DO Culture: An Oxymoron?

Charles Cogan's article that tried to sum up the Directorate of Operations (DO) "culture" (*Studies in Intelligence*, Summer 1991, pp.23-28) which I thoroughly enjoyed, only treats part of the issue, as he undoubtedly was aware, and as his subhead Hard To Define suggests. One of shortcomings with the article from my point of view is that, rather than looking at the overall directorate professional corps, he focused only on the operations officer. There are (b)(3)(C) professional categories in the DO, most of which are filled with people who resent the operations officers' presumption that only they are the DO. I should note that during the course of my 30-plus years in the DO, I have been in the ops officer category.

Certainly, the ops officer/case officer is the dominant figure in the directorate, (b)(1)

Virtually all the Deputy Directors for Operations have come from this group (Max Hugel is the only exception of which I am aware); they are the "top guns." This state of affairs is frequently justified by saying that the DO is an operations directorate, whose mission is to run operations, and which, therefore, should be managed by operations officers. In fact, of course, the basic mission of the DO is to collect information clandestinely and then disseminate it. Running operations is just a means to that end. Following that logic, the directorate should be commanded by Reports and Requirements Officers, one of the few categories in which I have not served.

A point Cogan makes, which is at the heart of the case officers' culture, is that the true ops officer loves the work. Finding ways to recruit an asset and then to run the case so as to derive the maximum benefit for the US Government is an exhilarating experience that more than makes up for the odd and long hours and for, at times, difficult working conditions.

Cogan is correct, too, in speaking of the ops officer as someone who basically dwells overseas. Despite new managerial emphasis on staffing DO branches at Headquarters with ops officers, the it's-in-my-blood case officer wants to be in the field.

The same feelings of excitement and commitment are found in the other categories of DO officers which are directly involved in operations. Overseas, Station or Base personnel usually see themselves as a part of the same team, working for the same goals. With few exceptions, the rancor and feelings of second-class citizenship are confined to Headquarters.

The DO is usually at the bottom of the heap in those parts of the bi-annual employee surveys dealing with personnel management. The deficiency derives largely from the case officer's preference for running agents and his or her disdain for tedious day-to-day bureaucratic tasks, including coping with personnel problems. A frequently voiced DO cliché is, "I don't know what I'll do when I grow up!"

The quasi-military approach taken by many DO managers ("Don't ask questions. Just do it!") reflects in part their interest in managing operations, not people. In part, too, the autocratic approach may arise from a feeling that "It is my turn, now." I recall one station chief who, upon learning that he was being appointed to head a division, said, "Now I will settle the scores of 20 years!" He did.

Cogan approaches the subject of elitism from various angles, including his conclusion that the ops officer is a "unique cultural phenomenon." He dwells on the comradeship among us, the sense of isolation from non-DOers, and our pleasure in each other's company. All true, from my experience.

Ages ago, when I took the Mid-career Course, we ops officers commented to each other about how much better we were than the rest of the class. We were always the first with our questions and our answers, while the our classmates from the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) were still staring at the floor. One of the wiser of us finally realized that we were verbal and glib as a group because of our training—and the personality types selected for that training. We were quick but shallow, and we had moved on without a backward look. Our DI counterparts, meanwhile were

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mulling over the question, seeking out the nuances and implications, and getting ready to offer a coherent, structured response.

I also agree with Cogan about the split personality required of a case officer or, at least, about the various "masks" he or she has to wear, depending on the operational situation. It is stressful to adapt to different sets of circumstance when dealing with or being concerned about the same people.

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This duality, coupled with the constant practice of the manipulation of others, can cause professional deformation. Those officers who take naturally to using con-artist skills on their fellow officers, on friends, and even on family are the scourge of the DO. (I have vivid memories of a former boss repeatedly manipulating the lives of his wife and daughter—sometimes, it seemed, just for the practice.)

I believe we can commit immoral acts as part of our professional life and still be moral in our personal lives. But it is not easy. In an environment which Cogan describes as "infinitely adaptable and slippable," it is all too convenient to see the distinction as shadings of grey. "Ethics" and "integrity" are buzzwords these days in the Intelligence Community; there is even a Presidential Council on Efficiency and Integrity.

From my parochial viewpoint, Congressional oversight committees have two salutary effects. First, they permit presumably objective outsiders to critique our

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touches on

this point; however clever and cunning the operation from a technical standpoint, it may be absolutely insane when seen in the larger context.

Second, and more important, the oversight committees help to keep us honest. "Plausible denial," at least to the Congress, is as dead as "democratic centralism." The play-it-by-ear and the-end-justifies-the-means schools of operations can no longer exist on a large scale.

Cogan writes that the cardinal offense in the DO is using manipulative skills in-house—"gaming one's own," he calls it. From my observation, the sin comes in doing it transparently. The more skillful manipulators are not as observable. In a perfect world, they would all get their comeuppance. In the real world, some appear not to have been caught (yet!).

In my youth, those who reveled in being privy to secrets were called "inside dopesters." As one who enjoys the language, I was delighted by Cogan's reworking of the concept to label it "anterior knowledge." It beats posterior knowledge every time.

Cogan's section on the detribalization of the ops officer was especially insightful, if a bit utopian. Senior officers have admitted to me that assignments to senior schools, sabbaticals, and even rotations to other directorates are almost universally translated into wasted time in their careers. Perhaps, as Cogan urges, the ops officer has to be removed from a certain fixity of focus. Unfortunately for that officer, the rest of the command structure remains fixated.

The DO leadership should take Cogan's advice about overcoming our insularity very seriously, indeed. The era of "I never had any training and look at how successful I have become" needs to end, if the DO is to continue to fulfill its important HUMINT collection role.

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